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ABSTRACT

This collection of writings is the culmination of students' study in the Worker Education Program's (WEP) workplace literacy classes. The WEP is a joint labor/management project of the Service Employees International Union Local 285 and unionized health care employers in Massachusetts that offers a range of education, job training, and career ladder programs for workers seeking to improve their communication and language skills, obtain greater job security, and move into higher-graded positions. The 59 authors represented in this publication are students enrolled in WEP's classes in English as a Second Language and writing and communication skills at five worksites in the Boston area. Although a few of the writers were born in the United States, most were born in a variety of other countries. Their English skills and educational levels range from elementary to postgraduate. The writings include anecdotes, personal histories, reflections, and poetry. (KC)

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Working Writers

*A Literary Collection by the Students
of the Worker Education Program*

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Fall/Winter 1996

Worker Education Program

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Working Writers

*A Literary Collection by the Students
of the Worker Education Program*

*"Works of art are celebrations
of ordinary experience."*

— John Dewey

Fall/Winter 1996

The WORKER EDUCATION PROGRAM is a joint labor/management project of the Service Employees International Union Local 285 and unionized healthcare employers throughout the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Founded in 1990, WEP provides a range of education, job training and career ladder programs for workers seeking to improve their communication and language skills, obtain greater job security and move into higher graded positions.

The authors represented in *Working Writers* are students enrolled in WEP's English as a Second Language and Writing and Communication Skills classes. These classes are held on-site at five worksites: Boston Medical Center; Harvard St. Neighborhood Health Center; Jewish Memorial Hospital; Columbia Metrowest Medical Center/Framingham Campus; and St. John of God Hospital. This program is part of a three-year grant funded by the National Workplace Literacy Project/USDOE to provide basic skills classes for working people.

Worker Education Program, Inc.
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Housekeepers, receptionists and laboratory technicians are among the many health care workers who come together to study in our classes. Most students are members of SEIU Local 285, some work in non-union jobs. They have worked in their jobs for as little as two and a half months and as long as nineteen years. Students come from as far away as Thailand and Colombia, and as close as Roxbury. They have lived here for one year, twenty years, their whole lives.

Some workers attend classes to become better readers and writers. Others come to speak and understand more English, which is their second or third language. Although the students have different goals they come with a shared desire to express their knowledge, experience and hopes.

At the Worker Education Program (WEP), we believe the goal of education is for students to become active and informed participants in civic life — both at work and at home. The ability to express, inform, question and imagine are traits we all desire. These core skills form the foundation of our program, and provide students with tools to shape the world around them.

Working Writers is the culmination of students' thoughtful study in WEP's workplace literacy classes. Through this collection we hope you, the reader, will experience these workers' dreams and struggles. Our students work full days, have family responsibilities, and often have second jobs. Yet they come to class with a desire to challenge themselves and to learn.

Having taken the opportunity to study, workers have begun to make changes in their lives. Whether this means communicating with more self-assurance at work, becoming active in their union or enrolling in a community college program, the students move forward on a continuum of change. We believe this collection of writings includes you in this continuum and we invite you to be changed by our students' words.

November, 1996

Foreword

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Annie Zhang

A Fall Leaf

The fall is coming and I'm getting excited again. I always love to see the changing of the leaves, and I always try not to miss any foliage seasons and enjoy them as much as I can. A fall leaf can make me think of a nice piece of music, an old friend, a romantic story.

I remember ten years ago, I was in medical school. One day, when I got back to my dormitory, I found a letter on my desk. I opened it and a fall leaf dropped from the envelope. I picked it up and looked at it. I was very moved and I felt as if I had seen my old friend standing in front of me smiling. She was a friend from my home town. We used to go to see the foliage together. I put that nice leaf in one of my favorite diaries. Every so often, I would take a look at it. It was always a happy moment.

Yesterday, I was in Vermont. When I looked at all the beautiful colorful leaves, suddenly that nice leaf appeared to me and I was thinking of my friend.



Annie Zhang is a research analyst for the Sudden Infant Death Syndrome Project at the Boston University School of Public Health. She loves the outdoors.

May Wong

My Good Friend

Loreen Green is my very good friend. She worked in the Human Resources Department of Boston Medical Center. I never forget her. She is a big lady. She has a sweet face and big eyes. She is very pretty. She is very friendly and nice. I love her.



May Wong is Chinese. She was born in China. When she was a little girl she left China for Hong Kong. In 1989, she came from Hong Kong to the U.S. She works at Boston Medical Center in the housekeeping department and is a member of SEIU Local 285. Of her job, she says, "I must clean seventeen patients' rooms, three shower rooms and one medical room."

Someone helped me give the application form to the Human Resources Department. Then the Human Resources Department sent a letter to me. I didn't know how to get to Boston Medical Center because someone had given me the application form. After I got the Human Resources letter telling me to come and interview, I was very happy. I maybe would get the job. But I didn't know where the interview was. I didn't know the place.

I tried to call the Human Resources Department to make sure of the place and how to go there. On the phone, Loreen told me the good way to get to my B.U.H. interview, where to take the subway, where to get the bus, where the Number One bus stopped, how many stops to go.

I arrived to see her. We were talking about the benefits. She knew I only understood a little bit of English. She helped me find someone Chinese to come and help me translate English so I could understand. I got this job. I always remember her.

A Rude Awakening

It was late spring, the flowers were in full bloom. The colors were brilliant and the combined scents were divine. On the days when the aroma is especially poignant, I like to keep the dining room window open with a portable screen in it all day. The room then fills with the beautiful aroma that drifts in from the flower garden, making the house smell like lilac, forsythia, roses and all the different scents of the other plants. The mixture creates the smell of a not house.

Late one night, after one of those days, I was awakened by an unusual noise. It sounded to me as if someone was coming in my dining room window. As I listened more closely I realized I had forgotten to take out the portable screen before going to bed. My family had warned me about that! How could I have forgotten their warning? Why wasn't my dog barking? He usually barked at the slightest unfamiliar noise.

The phone was of no use, it was too far from my bed. No lights were on and the sound came a little closer making me realize that the intruder had actually gotten in and was coming into my bedroom! That did it! I jumped up screaming to the top of my lungs and ran for the front door. I found that my keys were not in place (the key is needed to unlock the door from the inside) and I was trapped!

Just then, the room was flooded with light and there was my youngest son with a sheepish grin on his face. He had forgotten his keys and when he saw the open window decided to climb in quietly rather than wake me.

Dad Could Fix Anything

January 15th, it finally arrived. Beautiful, clear and cold. Nothing could spoil this day for me I thought. My sister Chris was coming home from the hospital after spending about three weeks there. I had so much to tell her. I smiled when I thought how she would feel when I told her about our cat, Mittens, she had given birth to two little kittens in the bottom drawer of our dresser. Mom was pleased that each of us would have our own kitten to take care of.

Phyllis Winston



Phyllis was born and educated in Connecticut and came to Boston about 40 years ago by way of White Plains, N.Y. She has worked at Harvard Street Neighborhood Health Center for six years. She loves to travel and expects to do much more in the coming years.

Phyllis Winston

Chris arrived about three o'clock that day but to my disappointment she said her legs hurt badly. She seemed different, she didn't smile and couldn't play with me. I kept thinking maybe tomorrow she would be happier, but later that night when we were in bed I realized that Chris was crying. I asked her what the trouble was, but she wouldn't answer me so I got up and ran to get Dad. He always seemed to know how to make things right.

Dad picked her up and sat her on his lap. Chris continued to cry. By that time I was also in tears. After Dad pleaded with her to tell him exactly what the real trouble was, Chris then opened up. She was afraid to go to sleep for fear of waking up in the hospital again. The needles, the cross doctors and nurses all dressed in white with their mouths and noses covered with white masks. This was not only painful, but frightening. She was afraid she would be going back again.

Dad promised her this was absolutely the last time she would have to go through this, and it was. That was the last operation for Chris as a child.

Barbados

As the day approached, I could scarcely contain my excitement. As the airplane made its descent and the island came into view, I thought I would burst with enthusiasm and pride.

While flying over the west coast of the island, the memory of the documentary I had seen, "Thriving Coral Reefs and Man Made Reefs", flashed across my mind. I thought of the Stavros Nikita, Barbados' only man made reef, which was in ruin. It could never compare to all this beauty I was seeing.

On my first visit to Graves End Beach the view was breathtaking. It was a beautiful, clear morning; not a cloud dotted the vast expanse of the azul sky, and the sun was hot. There was a tranquil swish of the crystal waters and a cool breeze was coming off of the Atlantic ocean.

I used to enjoy taking long swims to the yachts and wading in the water and that morning was no different. After about an hour, a dark cloud covered the azul sky and I could hear the roar of the rain while still in the water. It was completely normal for me to stay there while the sharp shower pounded my body. Then, as abruptly as it had started, the rain ended and the sun came out with even more steamy heat. After another long swim, I decided to leave.

Nothing could have prepared me for what came next. It was about fifteen minutes after the rain had subsided when I looked over my shoulder for one last glimpse of the distant yachts (by this time I was standing approximately 75 yards from the shoreline). To my shock and amazement, while I had been walking away from the crystal clear water, it had turned into a cloudy mass of blackness! A horrible substance was gushing and spreading its polluted tentacles across the ocean. Shocked into stillness, I looked for the cause. The blackness appeared to be coming from a drainage pipe that led to the ocean. Apparently, during the high tide the pipe was hidden, but on that morning it was fully exposed. I looked around to see if anyone else was witnessing this one on one devastation. I saw no one and ran for my camera.

So often we hear about pollution and we automatically associate it with big developing countries with their oversized industrial plants with towering chimneys that billow out smoke, big city car jams with intoxicating fumes, and the fast escalating menace of illegal waste disposal. All of these forms of pollution are becoming more and more detrimental to our societies, both big and small.

Dorothy Williams



Dorothy is the mother of three teenagers, an immigrant from Barbados, and has worked at Harvard Street Neighborhood Health Center for three years as a data entry clerk. Her hobbies are cooking, singing and writing. One of her future goals is to go back to college.

Dorothy Williams

My trip to Barbados brought this realization home with the snocking clarity that if some things, such as bad drainage, poor disposal methods, and littering are not changed in Barbados, we may lose our island forever to pollution.

Where Were You Last Night?

This piece was the result of the following writing assignment: Begin a story that either begins with or answers the question, "Where were you last night?"

Everything was a fog and my brain seemed to stop functioning. Slowly, but with urgency, I was being ushered into a room. In a sparse, gray room a tall Black man with a stern, almost hostile look on his face, towered over a simple mahogany table and two chairs. There was nothing else in the room.

I was pushed into one of the chairs as the man's towering strength hovered over me. Then, without hesitation or preamble, he roared, "Where were you last night?" I was shocked back to reality as he thundered again, "Answer me! Where were you last night?"

My anguished mind reeled as I tried to recollect the events of the previous evening. I tried to focus on this giant of a man who had managed to break through my fog and slowly, very slowly, the nightmare started peering through my cob-webbed mind.

Drinking at the bar, after the heated argument, the struggle, knocking the man to the floor, getting to my car, driving home and then, blankness. Waking up to a house full of police and flashing lights . . .

A Job I Loved

I have to work very hard in this country because I need money to enlarge my plaster factory in Brazil. In the factory, we make plaster pedestals for plants, and decorative moldings and tiles for ceilings. I loved my job with plaster because I can give idea for clientele. I can draw my idea on the paper. I have opportunity to create different models. I like U.S.A. but my family lives in Brazil. When I finish earning money for my factory I am going back to my country.

My Dreams

I am working very hard. I have three jobs. I want because I have dreams. I feel compelled to be here, but I'm going to return to my country someday.

I like here but in Brazil I have something strong, something like compelled, because I have friends, my family, my factory there. Over here is a good country. I have more opportunity for work, opportunity to make money. But what I think is more strong, my dreams. That's my objective.

My Good Time

In 1992, I went to play soccer in Engenheiro Caldas. I remember we won this game. The opponents didn't make a goal because my team is the best. When we finished the soccer game, we stopped in another city, the name Baguari — one bus with fifty persons. It was the afternoon. Everybody drank a lot, until 9:00 at night. We had a good party.

I liked to play soccer because I do something what I liked. That's my favorite sport.

*Marcio Vieira
da Silva*



Marcio is from Brazil. He has worked in the Food and Nutrition Department at Columbia Metrowest Medical Center in Framingham for two years. "I like playing soccer because in Brazil I did it a lot."

Ana Valencia Dream Vacation

I dream of a vacation, because I feel very tired. I like my job a lot but I need a vacation to spend time with my daughter. When I leave work, I have to go home and cook. I don't have any time to spend with her. For this reason, I dream of my vacation.

I wouldn't think of work at all while I was on vacation, even more the weather that's so cold. I dream about a vacation near the beach. I wouldn't have to think of tomorrow when I have to awaken at 5:00 in the morning, but could enjoy going out and spending a lot of time with Grisell, my daughter. She always says, "Mami, you always work during vacations." This is the problem, when one works, one forgets to live. The body also needs to rest.

Special Day

I remember the special day, my son's birthday. The neighbors came to my home, cooked rice and chicken and ate cake and ice cream. It was a surprise for the children. There was beer, a piñata, dancing, salsa and rock music.

On Sunday I went to church at 7:00 am. The Saturday night I went with my sister to the discotheque. On Fridays, I cleaned my home, laundry, everything ready for my weekend. In my country, everything is different. The people have time. Here is work to work. In this country the people are tired.

Ana is from Colombia. She has worked at Columbia Metrowest Medical Center in Framingham for 4½ years. Ana currently works as a Unit Support Assistant (U.S.A.). "I like this country because I have more opportunity here, and because there are many different kinds of people. My little daughter was born in Queens, NY. I love the spring time."

Wanda Sulkowski

Ugly Tongues

Some people have ugly tongues. They like to talk and talk. They don't think sometimes and don't realize how much wrong and bad they can do, just by talking.

People work very hard for years and years, building their position and reputation and trying to be something and go up and up. Then someday, someone is talking on the phone with a friend, with nothing better to do. Something bad is said about you and all the years you work for are put down.

It is easy to break something, but to fix it — is very hard.



Wanda Sulkowski works at Boston Medical Center (Harrison Avenue campus) in the Immunology laboratory. When she moved from Poland, the only English words she knew were "Hi" and "Bye." She is now a student at Bunker Hill Community College.

Cathy Simmons

My Friend Spot

I grew up in Greenville, South Carolina, and still have memories of my friend Spot. I remember one day while visiting this old lady, Anna Shaw, she said to me, "Would you like having this little puppy?"

I was so happy. I said, "Yes! Yes!" She gave me the little puppy. I named him Spot because he was white with black spots on his back and around the eyes. I fell in love with Spot and he loved me.



I had him for five years and during those years we played and romped around together in the field and over the hill. Then Spot got rabies and we did not know it until one day he snapped at my little niece whom he knew. My father wanted to shoot the dog right then. I begged, pleaded and cried to my father not to kill my dog. He just said, "Go to school. Go to school."

That day after school, Spot did not greet me at the gate and I knew Dad had killed him. I cried and just kept on crying. It was just like a funeral. My

heart was broken.

My parents bought me another puppy. He was black with white on him too, but this puppy could not take the place of My Spot. From that day on until now, I have never been attached to any animal.

Cathy Simmons is a loving, forgiving, compassionate person who now loves to write.

The Hard Life of My Parents

Isabel Rosario

When I was 10 years old, I remember how poor we were. My father was working in a sugar cane farm. Every day he woke up at 3:00 am because he never drove and he had no ride, so he had to walk. I had to wake up too, to cook something for my father to eat at lunch time. My mother couldn't do it because she always had a little baby. We were eighteen sisters and brothers.

Sometimes I cried for my father, especially when the weather was bad, raining, cold, thunder and I know that he had to walk.

I loved my father a lot and I suffered too much for him. We were close friends. I loved my mother but she was too strong with us. Anyways, thanks Lord that my mother was like that, because all of us grew up to respect people, to be intelligent, and have love for everybody. And we taught the same to our kids. My mother died when she was 72 years old. She got a heart attack. When my little boy was 5 months old she died. Now my son is 21 years old. My father was still alive until two years ago. He died with a heart attack like my mother. I miss him a lot.



Mango Tree

I remember many many years ago, my father found a little mango tree, and he planted it. Every day he put water and sometimes he covered the plant with a bag to protect it from the hot sun. I helped him to care for the plant because I was anxious to see what kind of mango it would be. And when the time passed and the plant grew up, what a surprise for me! It was my favorite mangos.

Then, when I was sixteen years old I went to live in San Juan. And always or every year when the plant had mangos, my father sent some to me, or when I went to visit them I ate a lot.

Now the beautiful tree has grown up. Its branches have extended and its roots have broken the cement yard in the front of the house. One of my brothers every two years cuts some branches to protect the house and he cuts the roots too, sometimes.

Isabel is from Vega Baja, Puerto Rico. She has worked in Housekeeping at Columbia Metrowest Medical Center in Framingham for 15½ years. "I came to this country looking for the best way for my kids. Thanks Lord, my daughter is a professional and my three boys have nice jobs."

Ana Rodriguez



Ana Rodriguez is thirty-four years old. She is married and has three sons. She is from Santo Domingo, the Dominican Republic.

Differences

My experience upon coming to this country was very different from what I thought it would be. Everything is different. One thing is the language, because in my country they don't speak English. The food and the climate are also different, since in Santo Domingo all of the seasons of the year are hot. The people are different, in the sense that we are happier. We like our music really loud and we make more noise. Americans like their music really soft. Americans talk less than we do. Another thing is that we like to eat more, for example rice, beans and meat we've prepared ourselves.

Expressing My Ideas

Maritza Rivera

POEM

I come to work
I work, I work

I used to work a 35-hour week
and I worked through my
lunches, now I work a 40-
hour week and I forget to
take my lunches

I type memos, letters, pick-up,
drop-off mail, I answer the
department's main tele-
phone number; I do many,
many things

None of those things, how-
ever, seem to involve brain-
power, creativity; it is what
I call manual work

When I come to writing class
I enjoy the class
First it gives me a break
from my job, and second —
as I thought to myself the
other day, "I enjoy this class
so much because it gives me
a chance to express myself"



I write stories, non-fictional all
My teacher gives me topics to
write about
She's right when she says that
you take a load off when you
write non-fiction

This class offers me a nice
break

I believe, I gather that at work
I suppress, at class I express

I express at class
I express, I express

*Maritza Rivera is a zealous
and eager person who aims to
achieve 100% outcome, in her
work, her life and what hand
she has in her son's life. She is
living life and learning from it.
Maritza is a person who thinks
a lot, analyzes a lot and who
embraces life.*

Viviane Plaismond

Work

Work is important. In my country, I was working not for money, just for volunteer, in the hospital. If someone was cut, I cleaned it. If someone needed an injection, I gave it. I did this work for nine to ten years.

In my home, I made dresses for me and my family. I made cakes. When somebody had a wedding, I made a cake for the wedding. If somebody had a party, they came to me and asked me. I made it for money, not for free.

In my country, I worked because I wanted to help people. This country, you work because you have to.

Viviane Plaismond is from Haiti. She has three children. She says, "I am a hard worker. I'm trying my best to make my children happy, so that they get a good education."

Maria Pires

My Family Dreams

My hope is to have a good family. I don't want my kids to get into trouble and go out on the street with other kids. I hope my God gives me the opportunity to see my kids grow up.

My dream is to give my son and my daughter a good education, to go study English when you come here because you have to defend yourself. If you don't understand anything about your work or job, it is very hard if you don't have school. I would like to be a good parent to my children.

I would also like to win the lottery and be a rich woman, so I can give my family everything they want and need.



Maria Pires was born in Cape Verde, Atlantic Ocean. She is working at Boston Medical Center in the housekeeping department and is a member of AFSCME Local 1489. She says, "When I first came to the United States it was so terrible for me because I didn't understand anything about English, jobs or work. It is very hard to find a job like in your country. When I work here it is different from in my country. Now I understand some more English. I like to speak English with my son and my daughter. I would like to say thanks to my teacher, my supervisor and my manager for giving me the opportunity to come to English class."

Gladys Petit

My Old Life

I was born into a large family, five children in all, four girls and one boy. My mother and father were very generous people.

My mother was a cheerful woman and always polite with everyone in the family. She was a housewife and took care of us. My father was a businessman, he sold liquor at a shop. He was an easygoing person by nature.

I grew up in a big city, Cape Haitian, and lived there for 21 years. I started school at age three. I remember when I was going to school in my country. My first experience was funny at school. At the age of three, in any first day, I was crying and I asked the teacher to send me Home, because I missed my mother, that was the first day of school. The teacher had to give me some candy to stop me. The first week wasn't easy, and the second week, I found a friend, and since after that I was so happy to go to school.

I was happy to live with my family. When I was twenty, I remember a sad part of my life, I lost my mother. During that period, I was rarely happy, instead I was sad most of the time. One year after, I got married and I started my own family. I left Haiti and travelled to Montreal, Canada. I began a new life there with my husband and first child.

My first experience in Montreal was terrible. The hard winter time made me feel so bad and I desperately wanted to go back home. I had my second baby boy in my first year there, I stayed home to take care of the baby for six months, then I had to go back to work. That wasn't easy, I had to leave him with a baby sitter for the whole week. I even had to leave him there overnight because my job was so far away. I passed by to visit and spend time with the baby around eight o'clock in the evenings, then I drove the long ride home. Once I got home, I would cook dinner and serve it to my family. I was happy to share my time with them, even if it was just a little. Even though times were difficult, I always enjoyed my family and was grateful for them.

The Dog

Can't walk, struggles

Intelligent, kind, and big

I love him and feel sad myself

The Dog

My Car

Drive and enjoy

Relaxing, fast, fun

The one I have to drive is excellent

My Car



Gladys was born in Haiti is the mother of three beautiful children. One of her goals is to get her GED. It is hard work but Gladys knows that one day she will get it and be very proud.

About A Dominican

In a town in the Dominican Republic, two twin babies were born. One of the two survived, the other could not survive and died. This child went to the city, Santo Domingo, where he studied for twelve years. He finished high school. He tried to continue studying but he couldn't. He came to New York, then after six months he moved to Boston, Massachusetts. That was in the year 1978. Later in 1979 he got married in New York City. This man was myself, Ramón Peña.

In the Dominican Republic I only worked in my father's business, but during the years that I was living in the Dominican Republic I learned that this country is very important. Why? Because many very important things that happened for the first time in America happened in the Dominican Republic. The first University in America was the Universidad Autónoma of Santo Domingo, and the first cathedral was there.

My family is made up of four children; the first is a boy and the rest are girls. Among my girls there are two twins. I have had a big change in my life, which is that in the Dominican Republic I only studied, while here in the United States I have worked all the time. And thank God I like this country very much. I have learned that work is the best thing a person can do. Here in the U.S.A. I have learned what it is to love my family and other human beings.



Ramón Peña

Ramón Peña works for Boston Medical Center, South Block, where he has worked for more than fifteen years. He is a member of SEIU Local 285. He says, "The work I have always done is maintenance, which I think is very important since this work always has to be done. I think that this is the best way to support a family. I was born in the Dominican Republic, where there are many good and very sincere people. It is also a country full of democracy and freedom. The most important thing for me is having kept the same job."

Luz Reyes Padilla



Luz Reyes Padilla is from the Dominican Republic. She has worked for Boston Medical Center for ten years and is a member of AFSCME Local 1489. She says, "I keep my job because I need it to pay the bills. This job is very important for me. I say thank you oh my God every day because I come every day to work. I keep my house."

My Family

My hope is to have a good family. I don't want my kids to get into trouble on the street. I'm working very hard because I'm keeping my family by myself; I have been divorced for twenty years. I help my family. My family now is married and I have three granddaughters. I am very happy for my family. One son and I bought a house together here. I'm working very hard to pay every bill: light, water, mortgage. Thank you for the United States.

Magical Egypt: A Trip to the Mother of Civilization

Since the age of six, I have been traveling in and out of the United States. Some of the places I've been to are: Barcelona, Spain, the Virgin Islands, Jamaica, St. Martin, Trinidad Tobago, Barbados, Nigeria, and Egypt.

In 1981 I travelled to Egypt. It was one of the most inspirational places I've ever been to. My trip to Egypt allowed me to venture out of my usual surroundings and customs into a world of fantastical treasures and mystical wonders.

I stayed in Cairo at the famous Nile River Hotel. It was right by the Nile, the passageway that the old Egyptians used as a major transport system. Among other things, they used it to move the lumber to build the floors of the famous Pyramids. It was a beautiful, clear, blue where I was staying, but as you travelled closer to the Pyramids, it became a muddy color. As I looked from my hotel room I tried to imagine the beautiful Cleopatra on her famous ride to meet the Pharaoh.

It was easy to imagine her beauty because all of the men and women of Egypt are very attractive people. Their eyes are beautiful and so is their skin tone. Also, I went to the Egyptian Museum and there I saw statues of both Cleopatra and the Pharaohs as well as their actual dress and jewelry. Everything they wore was made of gold. At the museum, I also saw the first Bible and the actual pen with which it was written (made from an herb plant). Everything in the museum was in Arabic, the first language of the country, and French, the second language. Very little was written in English because Egypt was colonized by the French.

The most spectacular part of my trip was the great Pyramids. I visited the two world famous pyramids called Gesus and Sakara. As I approached the Pyramids, I was amazed by the site of the huge Sphinx, with the head of an ancient Egyptian woman and the body of a giant lion. This statue represents strength and power. At the entrance to the Pyramids old men speak in parables and proverbs and everyone who visits stops to listen to them. As I entered the Pyramids I saw hieroglyphic drawings of animals on the walls. The Egyptian deities were represented by animals. Each with its own power for different reasons.

Geneva Marchisone



The name Geneva is a religious name and there is a city in Switzerland named Geneva, which stands for world peace. Geneva describes herself as a spiritual and open-minded person. She believes in and strives for worldly peace. As a result of her many life experiences, she has a lot of information to share with people. At this point in her life, Geneva can proudly say that she has achieved one of her ultimate goals, to become a caring and effective Social Worker.

Geneva Murchison

Once inside, I saw caskets containing the actual bodies of the Pharaohs. They were preserved because of a belief in reincarnation, or life after death. The Egyptians believed that the powerful Pharaohs would return to this world and so their bodies could not be disturbed. It was considered sacrilegious even to look at the bodies. Their internal organs were preserved separately in Calabasa jars, another vital and important part of the mummification process.

A parallel can be drawn between this ancient practice of mummification and what doctors and scientist do today with the donor banks. They harvest organs from recently deceased people in hopes of transplanting them to people who are ill and need organ replacements or they will die. In some ways, it is a "second life" for that organ and the person who survives because of it. It is a kind of living beyond death.

Finally, I enjoyed learning about the religious practices of Egyptian Muslims. They are very different than those of American Muslims. Egyptian Muslims take religion much more seriously. Their mosques or temples are very sacred and secretive. To enter, you have to take your shoes off and wrap your bare feet in a certain way. You also have to wrap a cloth around your body and kneel down on the floor facing the east with your head down to the floor and then bow three times. Then you pray and listen to the Iman (preacher). All muslims pray four times per day. When the rooster crows at 4:00 in the morning, everyone begins their morning prayers and they continue to pray to Allah until 7:00 am! Later in the day, they pray again, even at their place of business. They stop whatever they were doing, and they pray.

Also, the Caravan, the religious men who ride the camels, stop at the pyramids and dismount to face the east and pray. They, as well as the shepherds, distribute their wealth equally among each other as part of their religious practice.

Egypt was one of the most memorable places I've ever been to. I still have clear memories of the great pyramids, the museum, and the orderly lifestyle of the people. All of my travel experiences, but in particular this one, have inspired me to share much of the knowledge that I gained from them.

Textile Factory in The Big Apple

At the age of fourteen and a half I began my first job, working in a textile factory, in the Big Apple (New York City). I view that job as a positive learning experience. On my first day, on a hot summer morning, I entered into what seemed like another world, the factory shop floor was a bustle of activities and sounds.

There were people of many different origins speaking very fast in several different languages and using motions with their hands to communicate. They were all moving around quickly and efficiently making draperies, bed spreads, house gowns and other household items. I saw a main clock on the wall and smaller clocks in all the different departments as well as time scales on the tables of each department. I heard loud sounds from the clocks, bing-bong, tic-toc and from the sewing machines, clap-clap-clap and z-z-z-z-z-z-z. I could hear the swishing of materials being measured and cut into pieces. As I gazed at all of this I wondered, "how was I going to fit in?"

My boss was a fast talking and fast moving Italian woman with short blond hair and expensive rings on her fingers. She spoke with a thick Italian accent and a cigarette hanging out of her mouth. She decided to call me Geno (instead of my name, Geneva) After she greeted me and walked me around the shop floor she turned me over to my direct supervisor, a Spanish speaking woman, Olga Hernandez. The woman motioned to call me and said "Hena ventaca amiga" (Geneva, come here friend) and "mira" (look). Then she went through a series of motions explaining them in Spanish and broken English, "Folda like dis and do lika dat!" When Olga was finished, she said "Comprendo?" and of course, I didn't understand a thing. She repeated the whole procedure again and because of the repetitive motions and phrases I was eventually able to figure out what she wanted me to do.

By the end of that first day I was more exhausted than if I had been working in a cotton field on a farm in the south! I was so overwhelmed and felt dumbfounded. The day had been so hectic. During the breaks, everybody was eating unusual foods, I remember a large loaf of bread that looked like a monster, and there was a strong smell of garlic. They were ordering me around to get their coffee and tea. I asked myself, "Is this the working world? Can I cope with this mess? The people, the fast pace, the loud sounds, the two new names I had been given (Geno and Hena), the food, the smell of garlic?" When I left that day and each day that summer I didn't think that I was going to return, but I did! I returned all that summer and as the days went by I began to understand the life of the factory and the people who worked there. I even came to enjoy it and I returned for several summers after that! I got to know about the different cultures and languages as well as the various dialects within the languages. Over time, I changed jobs and moved up within the shop.

From that job experience I learned how to work with and appreciate people of different origins and backgrounds. Today, I can say that my first job influenced me in determining my work goals and objectives. I have been using and sharpening those skills that I began building at the factory ever since. Presently, I

Geneva Murchison

Geneva Murchison

• am a certified social worker, my job allows me the opportunity to
• use my creative abilities in listening, counselling and advocating
• for people. I also empower people to find and use various re-
• sources to get their own needs met. I work well in human ser-
• vices because I have had contact with so many different ethnic
• groups and I am comfortable with all kinds of people!

• Writing
• Practice and revise
• Descriptive, persuasive and informative
• Provides skills that are applicable in everyday life
• Writing

Alfredo Muñoz

The Efforts Of A Honduran

I am Honduran. From the time I was a little boy, I grew up in a small town in Honduras where living conditions were not very good. My parents were very poor. When I was six years old my mother died and my father was left alone with me and my brothers and sisters. For this reason I could never go to high school.

My life in Honduras was hard, since from the time I was a child I had to work hard to be able to survive. In life one goes through many things. When I was a child I did basic work, and through this work I became a man. Then I got married and started agricultural work and raising animals. Thanks to this work and also the help of my wife, I have been able to move ahead.

Now the changes in my life have been favorable, but life has taught me to suffer. I give thanks to God because he has given me life and everything I have. I would have like to have gone to high school.

Now I have been able to come to this country. Again, life has taught me that one has to work. The work I have now with Boston Medical Center is different; my work is maintenance and cleaning. I like the work; it is different from what I did in Honduras. I can't complain about life because it's going well for me. I don't earn much but the important thing is to work honorably.



About himself, Orlando Alfredo Muñoz says, "For me the most important thing in life is to be able to work and keep my good health with the help of God, so that I can help my family. I am a person who has fifty years of life and I have had various experiences. One of them is having come to this country, whose language is becoming difficult for me. I haven't lost the hope of being able to speak English. I am Honduran and I have only been residing in the United States for a year and a half. I like this country for its climate and beauty. I have only been at my new job for five months. I work for Boston Medical Center and am a member of SEIU Local 285."

José Morales

We Can Do Anything

The old taboo is over. Now people finally recognize the fact that women are not only good for cooking, take care of the children, or look pretty for men like any other merchandise.

Today women can compete in any area with men. They go to college, and they are as smart as men. Women are as successful as any man in managerial duties. Sometimes more.

Today men don't laugh any more about women construction workers, plumbers or electricians.

If you talk about politicians, women are doing a super job in the Congress, government positions, even as presidents. Twenty or thirty years ago, nobody could imagine women were going to assume such important roles or decision-making positions or hard jobs.

But the more impressive thing is in sports. Can you imagine a woman in a boxing ring? Today it is not a surprise. Women play basketball, football, baseball, and any sport, as hard as any man.

Women deserve a lot of credit because they in a relatively short time are changing a culture that for centuries, even more, millennium, had had them in a secondary position compared to men. I have the perception that it is going to keep changing, because a lot of men are still reluctant to accept that fact that women can be as good as men can be. There is no doubt in my mind, the taboo is over and we the men better start now to give women what they deserve before they decide to pay us back with the same coin.

Now, I would like to be more specific. The changing situation that I have been talking about is more common in developed countries, where the social, economical and political rules are more enforced. Unfortunately, in underdeveloped countries women are in worse condition. You won't believe me, but many businesses and factories in those countries discriminate against women because they can get pregnant and that is not good for the productivity of their business.

Some bosses even discriminate against women because when they get their menstrual cycle there is a possibility of them calling in sick or not to get the productivity that they expect.

Women in underdeveloped countries also have to deal very often with their bosses' sexual harassment at the risk of losing

their jobs. Even sadder is that when the woman has the courage to complain to the authority, they make a joke of that.

If you consider women going to college, even there, some teachers try to take advantage of them. They use "democracy" with women by telling them to choose to date them or to fail the class.

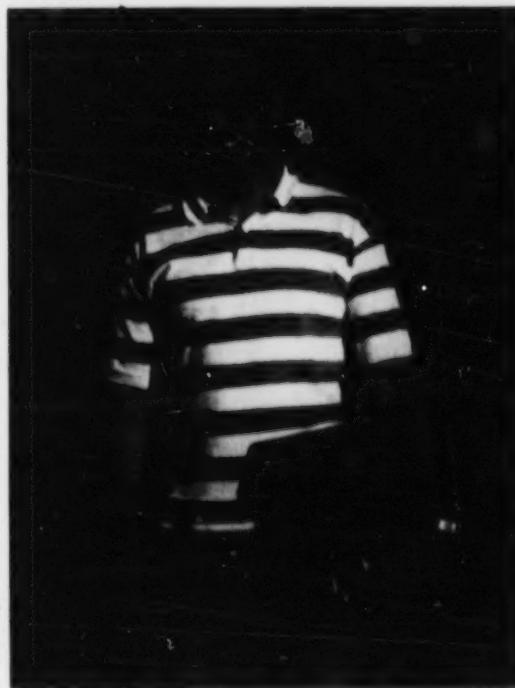
If women decide to stay at home then many husbands abuse them. They think that the woman belongs to them unconditionally because they are the ones who bring the money home.

This creates a big need for organization on the women's part. They need to create conscience of this situation and create or get involved with organizations that protect their rights in court. Also by pressuring politicians and authorities to enforce measures that create and protect equality between men and women.

I don't mean this is a fight of women against men. On the contrary, I think there are many men who are opposed to this nonsensical situation who can be strong allies of women. I made emphasis of discrimination against women in underdeveloped countries but it doesn't mean everything is fine in developed countries. Women are still discriminated, abused, in what is called domestic violence. But, at least law is more aware of that and rules are more enforced against it. Anyway, these rules do not seem to be enough, because for many years it has been going the other way. Men are "machos" and many of them think they have rights that by "natural law" women can't have. They confuse natural law with cultural aberration, something that even though it is wrong, you have been doing it for so long that it came to be normal. So, we have to change the cultural aberration. It's time to let people know that for a long time they have been doing something improperly. It takes a long time but it needs to be done. And that was my original point, it is changing. But cultural changes take process. How long? It is going to be a function of how fast we can transmit the equal status between men and women. Equality of opportunities in all fields — economical, political, and social. For that we need strong institutional support and men with open minds who make those reluctant to make adjustments look bad.

We need to be more vocal, we need to address the problem everywhere. We need to go public and be loud. If we do that we will be surprised with the results.

José Morales



José Morales is from the Dominican Republic. He has been working at Boston City Hospital (now the Boston Medical Center) for four and a half years. He says, "I love reading, sports, fishing and religious topics. I also like to work with people who need help in the workplace. That's why I'm a steward at SEIU Local 285." He also likes to work with the community.

Marie Rose Millien

My Name

My name is Marie Rose Millien. My name means a beautiful flower and the color pink. I was named after my Godmother. I was given my name because my Godmother loved Marie and she asked my parents to call me this name. My name suits me because I would like to be as the Virgin Mary, who surrendered her life to God. I love my name even if it is common because it is from my Godmother, who I love very much.

Memories From Haiti

I still remember Christmases in Haiti. Until and to this day I still miss them. I miss the French Christmas songs like, Petit Papa Noel and Munui Chietient. I used to go to church service with my mother from 12:00 o'clock at night until 3:00 in the morning. We ate pates and sometimes we made some beef stew. These are a few of the things I remember from my childhood Christmas seasons!

Trip
Drive and enjoy
Relaxing, busy, exciting
The one I made to Puerto Rico was the best
Trip

Car
Drives, gets towed
Expensive, beautiful and mine
My new car has been paid for
Car

Fish
Cook and eat
Expensive, delicious, and healthy
I love fish, it has good taste
Fish

Mother
Loves, cares
Busy, intelligent and kind
I miss my mother, she was special
Mother

Sister
Understands and helps
Pretty, good and healthy
I love her, she is good to us
Sister

As a nursing assistant at St. John of God Hospital, Rose completed three cycles of WEP classes.

My Life

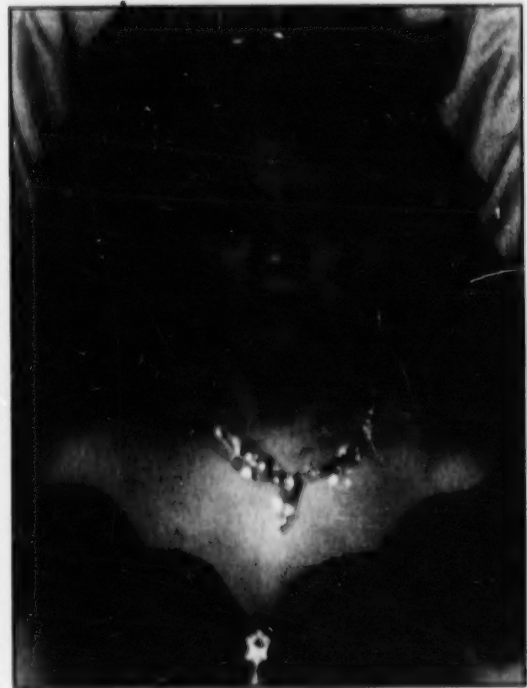
When I was a little girl I worked in the rice fields. I got up in the morning, picked the flowers and sold them in the supermarket.

In the rice field we cut the rice on the bottom and tied it up in a bundle. Then we took it to the big stone and beat it against the stone so the rice would fall out. After that, we carried it in a big bucket and brought it to the house. Then we cooked the rice in a big pot, took it to the stone again and dried it up. Then we took the rice to the mill to get the bad stuff out.

I enjoyed picking flowers. I like flowers a lot. It was hard work but enjoyable.

When I was twelve years old, I worked for rich people in Bombay City as a housekeeper. I cleaned the bathroom, the floors, the kitchen and the dishes. I didn't like it, but I had to send my money to my mother.

I needed the money. That is why this work was important.



Benedicta Menezes was born in India in 1954. When she was ten years old, her father died of a heart attack. When she was twelve, she had to quit school because her family was poor. She had four brothers and no sisters. That year she started work in Bombay City. At sixteen, she was married on January 26, 1970. In January, 1975 she came to the United States. She says, "I didn't speak good English, and when people spoke to me I couldn't understand. I did go to school to learn English."

Edla Mello • Changes

(Edla wrote this piece as a response to "Lali" by Nicholasa Mohr; an excerpt from the novel In Nueva York which tells the story of a young woman who leaves her family's farm in Puerto Rico to go live in New York City with her husband.)

That's the word I've been knowing, experiencing and living each day of my life now!

Sometimes changes hurt; sometimes they are pleasant or hard. You can change just a part of you or all of you . . .

I was thinking about this while I was reading the story. It reminded me of a lot of good things I left in my country! I can say that I didn't know how important the small things and short moments I had there were, or each detail that I didn't notice there at the time, now I do, and I miss all those things so much!

I don't know why I am here, but God knows and he has a plan for my life! I remember how fast the idea to come here came to me and everything to make it here happened suddenly in front of me. I didn't have time to think about it; I just did it! I feel now that this chance had to happen in my life! I can tell that that's a hard way to find yourself and your future out, but here I am!

I thank God for everything I've been going through so far. It has been important to me, everything. The bad and good things that I've known are making my mind and myself strong.

Right now, with all the changes that have happened suddenly in my life, I just feel a little like Lali, missing her country!

I miss my country now; I can imagine myself walking next to the water at the beach. I used to walk a lot, for a long time, listening to music, looking at the handsome men coming to sunbathe, walking at night and drinking coconut water with my friends, playing volleyball at night at the beach, or having a good time speaking with my family about things that happened in my day . . . I miss the life I had before, innocent, like a dream; now I see the reality, responsibility . . . I'm afraid of losing that time in my life and never go through those good moments I had again!

*Edla Mello works at Columbia
Metrowest Medical Center in
Framingham and attended
WEP classes for three cycles.*

The Situations of My Life

I was born in a small village called Cacaguatalejo. I was born during poor times. My mother was very poor. My mother's husband would get angry when she gave me the food that he wanted all for his child, and she argued with him about this. When I saw that situation, I left the house. I was six and a half years old.

I went to the ranch where my father lived and he put me to work gathering eggs and taking care of the animals, giving them corn and water. Because I was his natural son (born out of wedlock), he didn't treat me with affection, but instead gave me a lot of work and punished me. He didn't take me into account. When I was older, I studied only until second grade, because since I was a natural son, no one took into account that I might be able to study more.

My father got married when I was fourteen years old. He said that I should go work for him. I worked for him until I was twenty four years old and they didn't pay me anything; they only gave me food. I also did work for other people for pay, so I was earning money and buying animals. My father's wife didn't like that, so I left.

Then I managed to plant some corn fields so my animals could prosper. I got married and I worked hard so my children could study. They have taken advantage of that and have been able to study. I was never interested in living off another person, I only tried to see how I could manage to support myself and my family.

José Mata



José Mata is from El Salvador. He works in Jewish Memorial Hospital and is a member of SEIU Local 285.

My Family

My immediate family is composed of six people. Myself, the mother, my husband, the father, two girls, ages 12 and 16, and two boys, ages 9 and 10. The father is loving, caring and proud. He is very helpful to me and our friends and he is hard working. As the mother, I provide for many of my familys' needs. I make them understand that they have priority in the house. In terms of their needs, we create family activities, such as: playing cards, basketball, reading stories, visiting museums, praying and singing religious songs together.

As a family we are happy and we fit together well. The girls are quiet but mature, and they are careful with their belongings. My older daughter, is very neat and helpful with everything. She has a good sense of humor too. My younger daughter is a little disorganized and shy but, she is very smart.

The boys, on the other hand, are not so careful with things, they are a little clumsy and noisy, but they are helpful, like their father. They are also very curious about people and life in general. The oldest is talkative and likes to share. The youngest of the family is very affectionate. He is sweet and likes to have my attention.

I thank God for giving me such a responsibility. Without His help I would not be able to manage it. I feel happy in my family and they bring joy into my life. I bless Your Name, Lord!

A Story About My Name

My name is Germina. My name comes from the word germinate, which means to begin growing. I was named after my older sister, Germaine.

The day I was born, two other baby girls were born in my neighborhood as well. Our names were Elmina, Emilia, and Germina. We were a threesome. We were presented in church on the same day and we went to nursery school together. People always thought we were triplets. We shared our secrets and we all thought of marriage on the same day! We enjoyed our childhood together with love and respect and as we became older each of us took our own way, but until today our mothers still remain friends.

I do really like my name because it suits me. I am proud to be called Germina.

Reflections on Martin Luther King Jr.

Germina Louis

I can understand how African Americans felt years ago, they were in the society but not really a part of it. I can image how white people treated them.

Thank God for that brave, valiant man, Martin Luther King Jr., who stood up and gave his speech, "I have a dream." In his speech he says: something has to be done and that it is time to stop the segregation that Blacks have been suffering for so long.

Rosa Parks, a brave woman, got arrested for not giving up her seat to a white man. Life was tough in Alabama in those days.

Some of the terrible things that white segregationists did included: Threatening Dr. King's life, bombing his house, bombing a church which killed 4 little girls, attacking people at peaceful gatherings and marches and ultimately assassinating him.



Germina is a loving and busy mother who is in the process of getting her GED. She believes it is never too late to accomplish one's goals. Germina always thinks in a positive manner and never gives up hope.

Moreno Lisboa

How To Avoid Pollution

This piece was inspired by a picture of a man riding a bicycle.

Looking at this photo reminded me of what I read about what the environmentalists want to happen, and I agree with them. If we can avoid driving a car, we eliminate the pollution coming from the gas. Instead we can ride a bicycle if it is just a short distance. So if everybody will do what is in this photo, we will be out of danger in suffocating from the smoke that belches from the automobile.

Everybody must share their effort in bringing the world free of pollution. What everybody must do: first, if you can walk or use the bicycle instead of car, or share riding with somebody like in a carpool, you can eliminate pollution. Second: recycle everything like plastic containers (any kind), cans, glass bottles, steel, etc. Third: avoid dumping unnecessary fluids like oil, gas, etc. Instead bring it to the proper dumpster for oil provided by the government or to a gasoline station near your place. Fourth but not least, don't throw garbage just any place.

If everybody will follow all of this, we will have a clean environment free of pollution, like I saw in the photo: riding on a bicycle and clean surroundings. And for my part I always do some walking, if it is just a short distance. I am not using my car, that is why I come to work by riding the train and the MBTA bus everyday. We recycle plastic containers, soda cans, and everything that is recyclable and put it in a blue container provided by the government in our place. We do not throw garbage anywhere, but just put it in a garbage dumpster.

So if I can do it you can do it also.

Dream Land . . . ?

Most of the people living in Asia, particularly in my country, are dreaming to live in the United States of America. Those who are in the middle or lower class are very eager to come here because they said that there's a lot of better opportunity here. But it's hard to get in here because you must have somebody to petition you who is an American citizen — probably your parents, brother or sister. In the past I had to come here because my wife's father, who is an American citizen, petitioned her/us, but we waited for almost ten years before we came here. In some cases you can apply for a working visa if you are a professional or a degree holder. But it's easier if you are married to an American citizen, it just takes six months or more, maybe one year for the processing of a petition so that you can come here. It's hard to come here. You have to secure your original birth certificate, police clearance, health certificate and some paperwork. You have to pass the interview from the US Embassy in your country before they allow you to come in America. It's hard to come here but it's worth it, because of good opportunities, like good jobs which provide health insurance or pension plans for your retirement. And for those who wish to continue their study they can apply for educational loans or their employer will reimburse some percentage of their tuition fee.

As a matter of fact there's a lot of legal immigrants coming from different countries, like from my country, and I am one of them, because I like to live here and I'm settled for good.

Moreno Lisboa

Moreno Lisboa was born in the Philippines. He immigrated here in July, 1990 with his wife and daughter. His first job was in McDonald's, where he worked for three weeks. After McDonald's, he worked at University Hospital (now Boston Medical Center) in the housekeeping department. After four years of working there, he transferred to Nursing as an orderly. "I like to work in the nursing department," he says, "because I like to work with nurses to help patients in their needs."

Tar Pat Linehan



Pat is from Thailand. She has worked at Columbia Metrowest Medical Center in Framingham for ten years, three months in the Housekeeping Department. "I like this country because there are different people and different cultures. I have four children. I have been in the U.S. for twenty years."

Eleven

In my country, Thailand, I went to elementary school in the town of "Watcoudin" which means "temple on mountain land." I went to school for four years. Twice a week our class used to leave the school building and climb up the mountain with our books. My best friend and I used to sit down on a big rock and help each other with learning about the history of Thailand. After that, during our break time, we used to help the monks to carry sand to the top of the mountain. They needed the sand because they were building a temple on the top of the mountain. They also built a big room for shows of Thai dancing, plays and music. I later took dancing lessons there, but I was very shy!

When I was 11, I was in a play about a king who had a very ugly son. But at night he changed and became handsome. I played the princess, who was the seventh daughter of the king. She was the only person who could see the prince when he was handsome. The story ended when the princess married the prince and they went back to the palace because finally the prince changed to being handsome and everyone could see him. My best friend played the mother.

Spring

"Spring." This word meanings are new, and waking up everything. Flowers, trees, grass, people and animals are coming alive again. Winter is over. I feel different, fresh, tender, sleepy, and want something to do or change. Maybe buy new dress, clean in the house, change the place of the furniture. I look at the people. I feel something from them. Their activities, colorful clothing and even the air we breathe. Everything is more lively.

But one thing I don't like, what is it? It's wind. I don't like spring wind. I always felt a chill. Sometimes in spring still snowing. Spring is colorful and it gives to us hope, too.

My House is My Garden

I love plants and flowers and trees. I have a lot of plants and cacti. When I came to this country at first, I saw a beautiful view on the street. I said, "Thank you, God," because there were a lot of trees and flowers everywhere in my sight.

I want to have a greenhouse and a garden and I want the sun to come into the many windows of my house. Someday, I want to go to a class to learn about horticulture. I want to know a lot about how to care for my plants. I bought some books about plants, but I still don't know as much as I want to.

I talk to my plants when I water them and look at them. My son John said, "Our living room is a greenhouse." I don't have a garden. My plants are in every room. Where the sun comes into my house, in that place is my plant's home. When I see my plants, I feel so sorry because my house doesn't have enough sun for all of them.

Yoon Lee



Yoon is from South Korea. She has been in this country for 12 years, 6 months. She works at Columbia Metrowest Medical Center in Framingham in the Housekeeping Department. "I like living here because I have the chance to study whatever I want to. I have one daughter and one son. My daughter is twenty-four. My son is twenty."

Niquette Lafond

Christmas in Haiti

I want to tell you how Christmas in Haiti is different than in New England. First of all, the weather in Haiti is nice. Everybody goes out having fun. In New England it is cold and some people stay home. In Haiti you wear summer clothes but here you wear warm clothes and a coat on top of them. I miss the parties, I miss seeing people, and I miss the different foods. In Haiti, some people have parties at their houses and invite you over. The thing I really like the most is when we light the starlight sparklers and throw them up in the evening sky.

On January 1st our Independence day we make a traditional kind of squash soup which is delicious. There is also a special food (called Consome) made with goat which tastes really good. I miss it. The meat in the supermarkets here is too fatty and does not have the strong flavor of natural full grown animal meat.

These are a few of the things I miss about Christmas in Haiti. Christmas in New England is different than in Haiti, but it does have some similarities. For example, in Haiti as in the U.S., people have more free time during the holiday, they sing the same Christmas Carols (but in French) and the stores all stay open late.

I do enjoy both though, because I live in the U.S. now.



Niquette was born in Port-au-Prince, the capital of Haiti. She left when she was twenty one, got married in New York and had her first child at the age of twenty-four. She has two daughters and a son who love her very much and make her very happy.

Beach
Sing and walk
Empty, calm, and hot
But the one I go to in the
summer is very crowded
Beach

Market
Look and shop
Crowded, loud, and small
I like to buy my food there
Market

Birds
Fly and sing
Small, pretty, and fast
I like to hear their songs
at night
Birds

The Nanny Who Left the Baby in the Bathtub

It was one of those steaming hot days. Unfortunately, the technology of air conditioning was not available to us then. I was dressed in an uncomfortable fitting uniform that was a part of my job. It was made of a heavy white drill material with long sleeves, a button up collar, a tight fitting band at the waist and was almost ankle length. I wore laced flat shoes and stockings and a hat perched on the top of my head. I was a nanny.

My job was taking care of an eight month old baby whose name was Roxanne, the daughter of Mr. Robert and Mrs. Ruth Walker. On this day, Mr. Walker had left for work and Mrs. Walker went off to her Club. Normally, they would not return until noon. I had taken Roxanne out for a morning stroll before the Walkers had left and upon our return to the empty bungalow I sought relief from the heat for both of us. First, I got out of the awful uniform and donned a pretty loose cotton halter-top dress then, I ran a cool bath for the baby to sit in. Within a few minutes Roxanne was cooing softly and splashing her little hands in the cool water and I was happily day-dreaming about how I would spend my first paycheck.

I was seventeen years old and this was my first job, I would earn a total of \$4.00 (Trinidad) dollars for one month's work (that was considered good in those days). I thought of the negligee I saw in a little store in the village and the bright print material I would buy my mother so she could make herself a "Douette" (a bright colored flowing dress which was our national costume). I thought to myself, "now that I am working I can buy all of these nice things!" when suddenly, I heard Mrs. Walker's car pull into the driveway and I was jolted out of my day-dream with the thought, "I must get back into my uniform! As long as I was on the job, I am supposed to be wearing it!" Without any further thought I ran down seventeen flights of stairs hoping to get to my room and back before Mrs. Walker came in, but, I met her on the stairs on my way back to the bathroom, uniform in hand. She went into the kitchen and I continued up the stairs and into the bathroom.

I was struggling to get into my uncomfortable uniform when without knocking, Mrs. Walker came in. Roxanne was still cooing contently in the cool water. One look at her and I felt like a

Agatha Joseph



Agatha was born in Trinidad. She was "born again" in Puerto Rico in 1962. She travelled a bit and settled in Boston in 1982. She has been working at Harvard Street Neighborhood Health Center since October 1995 as a volunteer and since June of 1996 as a telephone receptionist. Her hobbies are travelling and dressmaking.

cat caught stealing cheese. One look at the situation and her mother's instinct told her exactly what had happened. "Agatha," Mrs. Walker said, in a chilling voice, "where was Roxanne when I met you on the stairs?" Only then did I realize the full extent of Mrs. Walker's response was quick and to the point, "Agatha, I can no longer trust to leave my baby with you." I was fired.

After only having worked for five days all the dreaming about nice things I would buy had to be shelved. The only thing I really disliked about the job was the uniform. Had I been honest about it with Mrs. Walker, I may have been spared the discomfort of wearing it and most importantly, I would not have exposed the baby to the risk of a life threatening accident.

As a result, I learned early that working in an uncomfortable situation is bad for both the employer and the employee. It's better to get things out on the table and talk about them. Although within that area I was known as "the nanny who left the baby in the bathtub" I went on to be a great nanny with many wonderful experiences and rewards.

Learning As a Way of Life

"You don't have to be so scared, Agatha," she said, to which I answered "Does it show that bad?" The things I had heard about computers really intimidated me, but I was determined to be computer literate, so I signed up for a nineteen-week course with Ability Based on Life Experience (A.B.L.E.) in Chinatown, Boston.

During the first three weeks of class I settled down to learn. My focus was on getting acquainted with the "monster" (that later become my friend) and on brushing up my typing skills. The computerized tutor helped to speed up my typing skills and showed me some games. The child in me really enjoyed the games and all my fears about computers were dispelled. I went on to learn Word Perfect 5 and Windows, but the most exciting moment was the day I typed 50 wpm (words-per-minute)!

There were twelve students in the room. Five of them were on my side. I occupied the first space with my back towards the third student on the opposite side of the room. I had just typed my last "e" when the professor said "Stop!" As I realized I had just typed a full fifty wpm I jumped out of my chair shouting "I did it! I did it!" All of my classmates turned to look at me and then the entire office staff came running in to see what was happening. It thrilled me to hear my professor say "at least somebody is excited about this course!"

The Power of Kind Words

It was 5:30 PM, winter time. Very dark outside and snowing like crazy. I had been so preoccupied with rearranging cards in my roladex that I didn't realize that someone was standing in front of my desk waiting for my assistance. I looked up and there was a young man with so much sorrow and pain on his face — as if his whole world had just ended. There was something about his eyes that made my eyes meet his, and for what seemed like a few minutes we just stood there and believe it or not we spoke without saying anything. We spoke with our eyes. His eyes were full of life, kindness and joy for just that few minutes and then that look of pain and sorrow came to his face again.

I said, "Hello, good evening — How can I help you?"

The young man answered by saying, "I have come to visit my sister. I have come from a very long way, Savannah, Georgia," he said. Just then, entering through your middle doors, two ladies were conversing, "She was so young, so pretty and everyone loved her . . . Virginia." The second woman said, "Her brother is supposed to arrive today. What sad news for him to have to hear." Then the young man said, "I am Virginia's brother."

Having the job that I do, is not always as easy and fun as most people think. Not only was this a time for kind, comforting words, but words that I had to carefully pick and choose to comfort this stranger who was standing in front of me. I stood up and put my hands forward and took his hands in mine and said, "I am so, so sorry that you had to hear what you heard, the way you did." Then I said, "But in those few seconds you heard things said about Virginia that some people never hear in a life time."

Tears just rolled down his face and he said to me, "What's your name?"

I responded by saying, "Linda and what is yours, if you don't mind me asking."

He said, "Malcolm."

Malcolm then said, "Today is the saddest day of my life." Malcolm's hands were still in mine. My heart was now very heavy with someone's grief that I didn't even know. I bent forward

Linda Jones



Linda M. Jones was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts and raised in Boston. She graduated from Girls' High School and attended Boston School of Business and Roxbury Community College. She loves reading, writing, cooking, music and especially meeting people from all walks of life.

Linda Jones

removing my hands from his and saw that he was wearing a cross. I said, "Do you believe in God?"

"Oh yes, Ms. Linda."

"Then believe that today is the first day of Virginia's real and everlasting life." There was a strange calm look on his face at that moment and he said, "You are right, Ms. Linda."

They were just a few kind words, yet I knew I had picked and chosen the words that Malcolm needed at that moment. They were just a few kind words that I knew would help Malcolm through the rest of his journey that day.

Mado

My mother, Mado, is a very likeable person. Everyone who meets her thinks she is sweet. She is a generous person too. If she sees that you have a need, she will try to help you. When I am in pain she looks like she is in pain the same way. She is very sensitive. If she could put me in her lap like a baby to comfort me, she would.

My mother is also a business woman and she enjoys that part of her life. She likes doing business. She has a store and everyday she goes to different places to shop for it. She buys things and sell them. She also makes homemade bread, cake and candy (with peanut butter and coconut) that she sells at the store.

Physically, Mado is average in size. She is a little short, has beautiful black eyes and a round, calm looking face. She likes to tell stories about her husband (my father), how he used to dance and play music. He was a musician. She also likes to tell stories about the old family.

As a family, we miss Mado (she lives in Haiti) and we look forward to her visits. She makes people love her by the way she is. I thank God for my very good mother.

House
Gers dirty and has to be
cleaned
Big, old, and pretty
It was new when I was a boy
House

Chicken
Buy and eat
delicious, the best, good
I like to cook it
Chicken

Party
Dance and enjoy
Fun, crowded, nice
It is good when they play the
music
Party

Color
Draw and paint
Blue, red, and black
I like to do it
Color

Vernita Jean-Gilles



Vernita was born in Haiti and moved to Boston when she was 34 years old. She has two daughters, ages 11 and 12. Her daughters make her very happy by singing, dancing and asking her questions about her life. In Haiti, she was a midwife and a kindergarten teacher. Now she is a Nursing Assistant. Vernita is happy to take care of patients. Working in a hospital is her favorite kind of work.

Hong-Yu Hu

My Son's Paintings

I really enjoy seeing my son grow up, step by step. He gave the first Mother's Day card to me when he was three years old. I was so surprised and so happy. I know the teacher in the day-care center must have helped him, but I could not help feeling great joy. On the card, he painted a few flowers. I had to use some imagination to figure out that those lines were flowers. He wrote awkwardly with blue pen, "Mother, I Love You." I naturally decided to save this card. Since then, I have had a lot of surprises like this card, and each time, I felt so happy that I saved them.



One day in 1992, I had to move to a new apartment. I found out I had collected a whole box of treasures which my son had given to me as gifts. I picked them up one by one. I could tell one story from each of

these gifts. I had to decide whether to keep them or leave them.

Finally, I decided to leave them, because the most important thing is that we have those happy experiences which will be in our memories forever. Nobody can take them from my heart.

Hong-Yu Hu is a Ph.D. candidate in the Molecular Pharmacology Program at the Boston University School of Medicine. Reading and nature give her peace of mind. She likes meeting new people.

The Trip

On this hot, humid day, the first week of August, 1995, I sat anxiously awaiting a ride to the airport. I had been wondering for several years how I would travel so far from home by plane and enjoy the trip. We were travelling to *that* continent. The continent least taught about and spoken about during my grammar, junior high and high school years. The continent referred to as "the dark continent," negative, backwards and mysterious in ways you could not imagine. Well, my curiosity was surely peaked. I had married someone from that continent, and we were on our way. Of course I was excited, overwhelmed and afraid.

My first obstacle — the flight. I had never been on a plane before and now I was venturing on a flight over the ocean. I can't remember how many hours the flight was — but never having been out of Massachusetts (besides visiting Providence, Rhode Island, once), I felt light-headed and faint with a queazy stomach. I fought this drowning sensation with picturesque scenarios.

I guess you could say I was the typical tourist. Straw hat, camera over the shoulder and my favorite green dress with matching sandals. I snapped a roll of film just of clouds. Boarding the plane was a breeze. Overhead baggage was placed in the compartment above our deep blue, velour seats. The stewardess demonstrated the proper placement of the oxygen mask, pointed out the emergency exits and safe head/body position in the case of a crash. This little show-and-tell did not at all ease the nervous feeling that was slowly creeping up as I realized we were rolling very slowly down the runway. As I looked across the aisle, I prayed.

When the plane descended over Monrovia, what a breathtaking sight . . . green luxurious scenery. There was not a cloud as far as you could see and the blue sky met the green earth. We had landed safely on the Motherland. Imagine — the birth of civilization — first universities and colleges, complexes, townships and cities. Governments and functional societies existing on this earth. I was standing upon while Europe was struggling to exist. Africa.

Karlai Holden



Karlai Holden is the administrative secretary in the Respiratory, Pulmonary, E/K/G Laboratory, Boston Medical Center, E. Newton Campus. Her interests are traveling, having new adventures, meeting exciting new people and lending a helping hand.

Latreva Heard • Just Relax

This is where I would go and what I would do to escape the pressure of everyday living. The first thing I would do to be alone, is tell everybody I am going away; then disappear — to a place where there's nothing but trees and fields. There's no traffic or confusion — just peace and quiet. I would love to be in Vermont, to be alone because it's so nice out there. My house would have windows all over, so the sun would shine in, and a pretty fire place that's lit to keep me warm.

I could go to one of the islands, but I'd rather stay close to home and be alone. Somewhere I can do what I want, eat what I want, and relax the way I want. Vermont is just like being in the country and I love that feeling. You don't have to worry about anything; it relieves the stress which you came to do.

As I wake up in the morning with the sun in my eyes, I give a big stretch and my day has begun. I go shower and throw on some lounging clothes. I make myself breakfast. I'll have buttermilk pancakes with bacon and smother it with that good old maple syrup. When I'm done, I would want to turn on some soft music and lounge in my lounging chair. I might read or just stare at the sun, making me think I'm on the beach — nice and quiet — no one to disturb me. And while I'm reading I would doze off and take a little nap.

When I awake, I may go out and do a little souvenir shopping for myself. Come back and make dinner. I would make steak and baked potatoes, and after dinner I would probably turn on the music and just relax.



Latreva Heard is a principal clerk at Boston Medical Center.

She is an independent Black woman who loves to travel and explore new things. She is a first time homeowner at the age of twenty four. She shares her home with her dog, Buddha.

Ramón Guzmán

With a Look Toward the Future With My Family

To go into depth about what I want to reach in the future: I want to be able to help the mother of my children come to this country and be together with them, so they form a family, because that is making my life very difficult in this country. When she comes to be with her children, I won't feel so much pressure because of them and I can make more progress at work and in my studies.

The reason my life is difficult with my children is because the woman I married here has her own children and she can't dedicate time to mine; she has her own problems. So when I get home from work I have to cook for my children, clean and pick things up. If their mother were here with them she could do these things while I work and finish my studies in this country.

The mother of my children is very hardworking and she has a strong desire to come to this country. One of my dreams is that she can come here and be able to move ahead. For the future, my family will be together.

My dream is to continue going forward and to work independently. Instead of being a worker paid by someone else, I want to have my own business so that I can help whoever needs to make progress like me.



Ramón Guzmán was born in the Dominican Republic on January 1, 1950. He worked as a furniture maker, got married and started his family. He came to the United States in 1989, got married again and brought his children to the United States. He started to work at South Block at Boston Medical Center one and a half years ago and is a member of SEIU Local 285.

Pedro Gomez



*Pedro Gomez has a big family
— thirteen brothers and sisters
who were all born in Puerto Rico
and grew up together. He works
at Jewish Memorial Hospital
and is a member of
SEIU Local 285.*

I Felt Very Happy

When I think about my country, it reminds me when I am a child, I'm running to my father's farm and picking up some fruit. I am playing in the river.

I think I go back soon. That makes me happy. When I think about my country, I feel like going back.

Immigration

What contributions have Puerto Ricans made? Pay taxes, work in the restaurants, going to church, to mop, to clean.

What ideas do people have about Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans? It is a beautiful island. Everybody treats you good.

What would I like to tell people about my country? It is a good island for vacation and commercial business.

Two Ships

When I first came to the U.S. 1981, I worked two jobs, one was full-time and the other part-time. I worked full-time in a factory in Chelsea and part-time cleaning in Boston. I lived in Somerville with my mother and my maternal grandparents at the time. My mother worked two jobs as well. Both of us had the same goal in working so much, it was to bring the rest of the family to the U.S. My father and my brothers and sisters (eight in all) were back home in Cape Verde Island.

Even though my mother and I lived in the same house we rarely saw each other, we were like two ships passing each other in the night. Every day before I went to work I went to her room to check on her. I missed her and would tell her I loved her even when she was in a deep sleep. I know that she did the same for me.

In 1983, two years later, my mother, grandparents, and I reached our goal. My father and all of my brothers and sisters came to the U.S. My mother and I were eventually able to work less and just enjoy having our family around. It was all worth it!

I Don't Believe In Alcohol

I don't believe in alcohol because it destroys peoples' lives. I know, because the destruction of alcohol touched my life three years ago. It took my best friend in the world, my father. He died from Alcoholism. I tried so hard to get him into a recovery program. He went for a few months and then he came out, but he started to drink again. He couldn't live without it but he couldn't live with it either. Even today, alcohol continues to destroy people in my family.

For many people, alcohol is very dangerous, especially for teenagers and for pregnant women and their babies. Teenagers should not drink alcohol because it can ruin their futures. It affects their thinking. For some, once they start to drink alcohol, they fight with each other and sometimes even kill each other. There is so much in the news today about parties getting out of control, especially on the holidays. Most of the time, when a party ends in violence, alcohol is involved.

I think pregnant women should not drink alcohol during their pregnancy either. It can hurt the baby. The baby could be born

Maria Gonçalves



Maria is from Cape Verde Island, she is thirty-three years old, and a single mother with a five year old daughter. She works full-time at Harvard Street Neighborhood Health Center as a Translator and Childcare worker. She is also a part-time student. Her goal is to become a nurse.

Maria Gonçalves

with mental health problems, such as Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, as a result of their mother's drinking.

Finally, I think that the government should have stricter laws around the use of alcohol because it is so dangerous.

Take A Vacation!

I would like to recommend to my friends to go on vacation to Cape Verde Island. It is located off the west coast of Africa. The weather there is very hot twenty-four hours a day and it is a very beautiful place.

You will like the food very much because everything is natural and you don't always have to buy it, people will invite you home for meals! The people are very friendly with each other and make tourists feel welcome. People in Cape Verde Island speak English so you don't have to worry about the language.

Because the weather is so hot, people like to celebrate twenty-four hours a day. You will have a great time at all the parties! You can stay on the beach all day and all night with the bands playing. People stay out because it can get very hot inside the hotels and houses. No one bothers you if you are on the beach at night.

If you like to travel, this is the place to go!

Ashley

Sleeps and plays

Intelligent, inquisitive, cute

She makes me happy

Ashley

School

Reading and writing

Interesting, important and makes me feel good

When I was a child I loved to go

School

A Day I'll Never Forget

On October 26, 1986 my first niece was born. I was very happy when I saw her for the first time. I lived with my brother (my niece's father) and my sister-in-law (her mother). They were young and they needed so much help. My mother and my sister lived in the U.S. They were very happy when my niece born too. I felt as a second mother because I loved and still love my niece.

My niece was a premature baby. My sister-in-law needed so much care and orientation because the baby was her first baby. My niece was in incubator for three days. She needed to recuperate her weight.

My niece's name Yanina. She is very intelligent and obedient. She likes to study and help me when she is in my home. I hope that my niece keeps her same character forever.

Esther Fuertes works at Columbia Metrowest Medical Center in Framingham. She participated in the WEP English classes for four cycles. In May of 1990, Esther completed a C.N.A. course (Certified Nursing Assistant), with the goal of being able to work as a nurse in the U.S. Esther holds a degree in nursing from her native country, Peru.

Ida Fortune

Some People Are Like That

On a very hot day back in Georgia, I was riding my bicycle up and down Bethel Street. I decided to go to my friend Jewel's house. Going down the street, a dog ran out and started chasing behind me. I started to pedal faster. All of a sudden, I fell off the bike. I bruised both of my knees, arms, legs and the steam from the pavement seemed as though it stuck in my knees. I could not walk for three or four days. After I fell, the dog ran back into a yard. A white family was sitting in their yard. They saw their dog chase me. They did not bother to call the dog back. They knew that the dog would chase black people in the community.

From that day on I stopped riding my bicycle.



A Food That Reminds Me of My Youth

Ida Fortune has a son and a daughter. Her ambition is to have some adventures and get more education. She loves reading and writing.

My Mother always made cornbread stuffing during Thanksgiving. The ingredients: corn meal mixed with the broth of a chicken or turkey, eggs, salt, black pepper, butter, onion, celery, green pepper, Bell stuffing seasoning and some other spices. She put it in the oven at 350 and let it bake until the top was brown like a cake. No matter how much she made, I could never get enough of that taste. I have made it myself many times, but mine never tastes as good.

Marta Espinal

Weekend In Colombia

Saturday, go shopping and cook rice, beans, beef or sancocho. Then I would call to my family to come to my house to eat. When I finish, we go the living room, talk to different ideas, like planning for Christmas, vacation or presents. Take a snack and coffee at 10:00 pm, then the people go to different houses to sleep. Sunday morning, take breakfast at 10:00 am. At 1:00 pm, go to church, then return to my house.



*Marta works at Columbia
Metrowest Medical Center in
Framingham.*

Suzie Eltume : My Name

My name is Marie Suzie. I was named after the Virgin Mary, the Mother of Jesus. My mother thought it was a blessing to give me that name. She hoped that I would be blessed as

I grew up. She wanted me to be like the Virgin Mary in some ways. She encouraged me to be prayerful, truthful, generous, and loving.

For my middle name, Suzie, I was named after a little girl who lived near our house. She was pretty and intelligent. Everybody liked her.



Learning English

English is important for me because I live in a country where it is spoken all around me. It is the dominant language. Without English, I can't work. At

my job I use English to communicate with the patients, their families, my supervisor, and co-workers.

I have two children who speak English as their first language. They can also speak French. I can speak to them in either language but they prefer English. To get along in the U.S. and also to enjoy your life here, you have to be able to speak and write English.

As a nursing assistant at St. John of God Hospital, Suzie is currently enrolled in her fourth cycle of WEP classes.

Snow
Falls and piles up
White, cool, and soft
When it falls it is very
romantic
Snow

Mouse
Run and Squeak
Brown, ugly, and tiny
It comes out at night
Mouse

Chinese Immigrants In The U.S.

The United States is like a melting pot. People came into this country from all over the world. The languages, colors, and cultures are all different. It is very difficult for the immigrants to first settlement in a new place, especially in a land which the language, the cultures are different. If people think back to their beginning on arriving in this country, they can tell you a lot of stories about their difficulties.

The first Chinese arrived in the U.S. about 150 years ago. People in China were extremely poor. A lot of people died of hunger there. They did not have any money. The way for them seemed only to wait and to die. At the time, they heard that there was a lot of gold in the U.S. And it was waiting for people to dig. Some Chinese believed it. They wanted to find some gold to save their whole families' life. Some people wanted to get their golden dream. They came to the U.S. by ship as employees of labor. They could not find any gold for themselves here. Instead they found that the life here was very difficult. They did the hardest work such as to build the railroad and the highway. They experienced a lot of sad stories which they never had before in their life. Their history in the U.S. was filled with their own blood and tears.

The living conditions were very poor when they first came into the U.S. Most families lived in only one room which they used for sitting, sleeping, and eating. There was no ice box, no hot water. They used hand to wash their clothes and dried them on the roof or in the hallways. In the evening, from the roof, they can see stars. When it rained, everyone had to run for the buckets.

Chinese immigrants were limited in society, because they were subjected to discrimination. This discrimination spread to their second generations. Their children were not admitted to white public schools. Chinese parents, facing the discrimination, responded by financing their own English language school.

I had a neighbor who immigrated to the U.S. 27 years ago with her husband and her three year old son from Hong Kong. Her family has lived in the Chinatown community since their first arrival in Boston. Her husband owned a Chinese restaurant with some partners ten years ago, and he still works in his restaurant. When she first moved here, she needed to take care her two

Donna Doung



Donna immigrated to the US in 1989. She started to work at Boston City Hospital (now Boston Medical Center) in 1991. When she started, she worked at the TB Clinic as a principal clerk for two years. Then she transferred to work at the Medical Records department as a supervisor of the correspondence office. "During these five years working here," she says, "I learned and grew. I love this place. I like to work with people. I like to help people. I hope that I will continue to learn more in my future."

Donna Doung

children. She sewed at home. Now, she has been working in a hotel as a cook almost ten years. She speaks some broken English, because she did not have a chance to go to school. Her son and her daughter finished the college degree. Both of them got management positions in the big companies. My neighbor is very proud for her children. She pointed out one Chinese immigrants' popular comment. They moved here and sacrificed in order to give the next generation a better chance. For them, the first generations here, it took a lot of hard work, sweat, and tears. But it was worth it to put their children all through college.

Looking back on myself when I started to live here seven years ago, I feel, I was much better off than the first Chinese immigrant. The discrimination has been changed a lot. Now people are protected by law. The Chinese have already entered in to the mainstream of America society. A lot of Chinese have business here. Some Chinese work in the higher level fields as engineers, doctors, lawyers, and etc. In the Chinatown's community, we have the Asian American Association which is very helpful for Chinese. The association created different level English classes, job training classes, and some Chinese language classes for the Chinese who were born in the U.S. Also, the association offers job counseling, related services and social activities. Looking ahead in a few more years, the Chinese will participate fully in America society.

The Final Day of Vacation

Reported in the Social Community Magazine, No. 127, edited in Puerto Rico. September, 1996.

I'll never forget the final day of vacation when I was spending my time at the "Santo Tomás" beach in Puerto Rico, during my four visits in the last three years which the members of Tropical Club organized a special dinner. I was just vacationing in the same place as them.

The variation of foods from Tropical Country were: coconut, rice, banana, beans, pork, vegetables, broccoli and other things. The taste of the dinner was excellent. Everyone enjoyed it very much.

Different sports were programmed with success, when the whole group of members played on sand and their faces were looking smiling.

Meanwhile I was enjoying a swim in the Caribbean Sea. When they watched me from several feet of distance, they exclaimed, "Hey, guy, please come here." I asked them, "Do you call me?" They said, "Yes, sir."

Immediately I went to them and I said, "May I help you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Could you find some place that we can buy ice cream, refreshment?"

I answered, "Of course, I'm going to show the nearest business around here."

We walked for fifteen minutes to arrive there. They bought ice cream refreshment and something else. We came back to the same place as before.

The leader of the group was Elizabeth Taylor, a wealthy lady that showed her beautiful body. Her arms and legs looking very strong; probably the exercise in the air kept her in a good physical condition.

I knew the Tropical Club three years before, but this is the first time that I participated. The members were women and men. I hope they will be that nice again.

Jesús Cabral Díaz



Jesús Cabral Díaz is 45 years old. He was born in Bani, Dominican Republic. He has been working at the Boston Medical Center since March 3, 1996. He has been with SEIU Local 285 since March 21. He says, "I feel proud to be an English student. When I finish this course I would like to continue the English classes next year, because I want to have better communication with others."

Jesús Cabral Díaz

Las Colonias Village

From: New Mexico History during the end of the 17th Century.

In the time when New Mexico belonged to Spain, there was a woman named Gardenia Gonzalez of the land Las Colonias Village. After her parents died she preferred to stay home to continue the duty of "El Rancho" in the field, because her mother and her father loved too much this land.

One morning Gardenia thought to follow those same activities of her parents. First she prepared a big corral for animals (cows, sheeps, chickens, and another else.) Only a brown dog called Saltarin was her best friend in those times.

Very soon she saw that the agriculture and her animals were growing very fast and she needed more time to take care to them.

It was impossible for her. She needed someone that could help her in those activities. Gardenia explained, "I can't follow this life alone, I would like to find a companion that could help me because every day I have a lot of things to do."

Three weeks later on Sunday afternoon she walked with Saltarin (her dog) around Las Colonias Village and saw many people together dancing over there.

She thought, "How I would like to enjoy with them, but my problem is, I can't dance because I don't know how to do it."

One lady that walked around her stopped in front of her and asked, "Are you looking for someone over there?"

"No, I'm only looking at the people dancing."

"Do you like to dance?"

"Oh, no, thank you, I don't know how to do it."

"It's very easy, don't worry. I'm going over there right now, if you want to follow me."

Gardenia felt proud that somebody invited her. When they arrived many young men watched her, already Gardenia was one of the most beautiful girls of the village. Few minutes later one elegant young man was surprised, when he saw her green eyes, red lip and face as a flower, he went to her and said, "I'm glad to know you, my name is Casimiro Almonte. I live around two blocks from here. And what's your name?"

"My name is Gardenia Gonzalez, I'm glad to know you, too. I'm living at El Rancho, in Las Colonias, too."

Casimiro exclaimed, "Don't tell me that you're the daughter of Don Flurgencio and Madam Elistha!"

Gardenia said, "Yes, Casimiro. Do you know my parents? Yes, of course, they're were very loved by people of this village."

Casimiro explained, "A long time ago I had moved to the city of Monterrey, Mexico to study there and 3 months ago I returned here. This is the reason that I never saw you over there."

In this time Gardenia recognized that Casimiro was the man that she was looking for, and said, "My father died two years ago and my mother died six months ago."

Casimiro asked her a second time, "Would you like to sit down a moment?"

"Okay, thank you."

After a couple hours of talking and talking their faces were smiling and looking happy. Two days later, Casimiro went to visit her at El Rancho. When Gardenia saw his face, she felt that her heart was moving faster as normal, immediately she understood that this guy was her Valentine love.

Gardenia was waiting for Casimiro to start to declare his love, but it was understood. Only seeing their faces, they knew it had been said.

After sitting together in silence, words didn't appear. Who was going to start to talk? Finally Casimiro explained, "I had waited a long time to know a girl as nice as you and I think to marry you, if you consider me important in your life."

Gardenia felt a joyful emotion about Casimiro's feeling and exclaimed, "Really, do you want to marry me?" He exclaimed, "Of course, I'm telling you the truth. What's your answer?"

Gardenia said, "Yes, Casimiro, I would like to be your wife, when you decide."

Immediately they kissed deeply for a few minutes.

The next week Casimiro and Gardenia went to the church with several friends and families and priest of the church gave the blessing to them.

Just married, Casimiro and Gardenia found that was the solution of their life.

Every morning, Gardenia would take care of animals and Casimiro would work in the field and carry the food to the house.

Some days later, Gardenia gave good news to him: "I'm pregnant."

When Casimiro heard it he said, "Oh, this is a gift from God! I'm happy and proud."

Nine months later a child was born, and they called him Casimiro Junior. He weighed 8 pounds.

Meaning of some words in this story:

Corral: special place used to keep animals together.

El rancho: same thing as a home.

Saltarin: a dog's name.

Jesús Cabral Díaz

Jesús Cabral Díaz

My Concerns of Worker Education Program

I consider the Worker Education Program very necessary because it opens opportunities and facilities to all employees so everyone can have the best communication.

When we understand the things that somebody tells us, this is very important in our life. At the same time, around our workplace we use English language every day.

If the teacher talks to us about different themes we can appreciate the wealth of knowledge. Find an exact conclusion about problems or other situations that appear suddenly.

Right now we can't waste our free time on things without importance, because it disappears very soon. The best idea is to study constantly since our future depends on the success.

I say thank you very much Worker Education Program. I'll never forget the multi-benefits that we're receiving every day.

Miracle

Today, on the 25th of June, I'm here on behalf of all of us, to thank our Supreme God for having given us the opportunity to complete the first cycle of English together.

I can't find the words to thank those who dedicated themselves to this work with so much affection.

We expected to find just teachers, maybe demanding or distant or just following the union's line. Then, after the first cycle together, we have some time off, but we don't want to stop here, because we have become friends.

We want only to ask the teachers a big favor, that they continue to contribute this gift to others, and that they never lose the affection and strength to carry on. Perhaps we are leaving, but others will come and they will need you.

We are immigrants in this country, without a sense of direction, and we suffer all the consequences of fish out of water. Each day, the absence of our loved ones, the loneliness, the discrimination and unemployment grow.

Nevertheless, we have a sense of certainty inside that God helped us to get to this point, and he will not abandon us.

This is barely the beginning, but little by little, we will arrive at our desired goal. We tell each other to be strong. As difficult as it is, we remember that if God is for us, who could be against us?

To everyone, happy vacation. It was good to be together. We will return, certain the victory is ours.

May God bless us.

Mara Cumba

Mara gave this speech at the completion ceremony after the first cycle of ESL classes at Columbia Metrowest Medical Center in June, 1995. She attended WEP classes for three cycles.

Marvin Craig



Marvin lives in Boston. His home country is Jamaica. He has worked at Columbia Metrowest Medical Center in Framingham for two years. "I like work, and love money. I love to listen to reggae CD's."

Team Work

August 1977

We start work on the site. Me and my father together. We work as a team and that's the way we can make some money from mason work. We lay blocks, lay stone and bricks. We stay out in the week and come home on Friday night, and we have a good time.

Far From Home

Me so far from home. Like I'm trapped. I would like to go home and spend time with my family. Me so far from home. Thinking about my family. Me want to sit down and talk to them. I would feel so good. I would hug my kids. I feel like I'm in the next world so far away.

Sweet Jamaican Coffee

October is the real coffee crop time. Because you get the rain to ripe up the berry. The trees, it is so beautiful, like a flower. When the trees bend down with all the berries we go in the field and reap it. You have to select the ripe ones from the green ones. I like to pick it.

Me and my family we pick the coffee. We bring it to the depot and sell it by the box and get a voucher. Then you bring your voucher and collect your money in a check and change this.

Thank God.

Arrival in Boston

I had just moved to Boston after graduating High School in Georgia. I came to help a sister whose husband had just died three months earlier. She needed a baby sitter for her two small boys, Ardie and Anthony, ages two and five.

After being in Boston for four months, I found a job through an employment agency. I was hired at Brecks's of Boston, a mail order catalog company.

Getting to work was scary though, because the bus system was confusing. The first week I got lost twice! My sister was really worried when I arrived home late. She had imagined all kinds of things happening to me because I was so new to Boston. Back home in Georgia, I lived in a small town and I wasn't used to a city with a complicated transit system, but after a week I had my bus schedule down to a tee.

My job was sorting orders by state and product. It was exciting to work, to meet my co-workers and to know I would have my first paycheck! We worked at a fast pace and once we mastered cataloging, typing and taking orders by phone we were considered for Computer school. The company would finance the training.

I became proficient at my job and I advanced in the company quickly. During this time I met someone special and fell in love. While I was being considered for promotion and computer training I was also thinking seriously about marriage. The thought of being married and starting a family put me in a daze of happiness. I made a decision to leave the job and get married.

Unfortunately, during the next year, my "blissful" marriage began to crumble and gradually it ended. Looking back, I always wondered if it had been a hasty decision, leaving my job in order to get married. If the situation was presented to me again, I think I would choose differently.

Science Class

During my first high school year we were sitting in science class and our teacher, Mr. McManus, was explaining that science was based on theories backed up by facts and not superstition. He started to explain that on the way to school he

Alice Conley



Alice is a middle aged woman who has attained her Medical Assistant Certificate. She strives to show kindness, empathy and compassion to people in need of help. One of her goals is to use her computer more.

Alice Conley

had observed a man walk under a ladder and then suddenly stop, go back under the ladder, cross one foot over the other three times and go around the other way. I knew from the description he gave that it was Mr. Shorty, a local storyteller and a very superstitious person. Mr. McManus stopped the man and asked "what was that about?" Mr. Shorty explained that it was bad luck to walk underneath a ladder and if you did, anything could happen. So in order to remove the hex you had to do the ritual.

My teacher said that the ritual Mr. Shorty performed was only a myth or old wives tale and not a proven fact. Then he pointed out that there was no proof that if Mr. Shorty had done nothing, something bad would in fact happen, but his belief in the myth was so strong that he could not ignore it.

Having been raised in a culture where myth and superstition were considered a normal part of life, that introduction to science had a profound effect on me and I have never forgotten that day.

Twenty-five years later, at our class reunion, I saw Mr. McManus and even though we had both changed in appearance, we recognized one another. I reminded him of that experience in our first science class and he said "I can't believe you remembered that, at least I made an impression that stuck!" We both laughed and laughed. As we continued to talk and I told him that I had become a Medical Assistant, it struck me how much of an impact that early experience had on me. Even though I came from a heritage that was rich in superstitious beliefs I chose a profession where diagnoses are based on proven factual theories. Although I appreciate the richness of my cultural background I have not let the belief in myths or superstitions cloud my way of thinking.

Housework

Alice Conley

Do you find housework dull? Well most people do, but I've found there *are ways* to take the boredom out of housework. A few things I've tried to make it interesting and meaningful are: getting exercise while I'm cleaning, putting music on for entertainment and focusing on the finished product.

Vacuuming, dusting and general cleaning can be a way to tone and strengthen your body. When you vacuum you can stretch your calf and thigh muscles and when you dust and clean windows or walls you can stretch your arms and upper body.

I always put something lively on my stereo to lift my spirits and to encourage movement while I clean. The music also distracts me from the dull tasks I am doing. Sometimes I'll listen to a whole tape and not even realize that I've managed to clean the entire bathroom!

Finally, I like to focus on how attractive my home will be when it is clean. I do this by cleaning one room at a time. When I'm finished with one, I step back and admire it before I go on to the next "disaster area". I often add finishing touches, like a vase of flowers, before I start the next room. This gives me a good feeling, like I have accomplished something. I may not be finished with *all* my housework but I feel good and often this motivates me to continue!

With this new approach, I have been able to transform what used to be a dull and tedious day of housework into a day of fun!

Liu Qin Chen



I Hope

I hope for my work I can speak good English, and I can know more about everything. At home, I hope all my children can do everything, cook good food and anything. I hope in my family everyone has good health, and that in my life all my children can finish college and find a good job, and have good health and a good family.

I dream for my work not to work hard. I can make more money. I dream that I have a big and beautiful house, and in my family everyone makes more money, and no one has to do anything in the house. I can hire a housekeeper. In my life, I dream I have good health and make more and more money, all my children can find a good job, and everyone has a good family and respects old people.

Liu Qin Chen is from China.

She is working at Boston Medical Center in housekeeping and is a member of SEIU Local 285. She is married and has five children. Her husband works at a restaurant. She has three daughters studying in college, one daughter studying in high school and one son studying in middle school. She has bought a house and a car. She says, "In my family, everybody is very happy."

María Cesar

The Change In My Life

My name is María Cesar, I'm fifty-one years old and I'm from Brazil, South America. My native language is Portuguese.

I came with my husband to the U.S.A. in 1987. That was not easy for us.

The change in my life was so big, principally because of the language. I didn't understand the English language.

I want to say how thankful and appreciative I am to this country and the people that help me and make my life possible, teaching me the way.

Thanks so much.



María Cesar is from Brazil. She works in Boston Medical Center and is a member of AFSCME Local 1489. She speaks Portuguese.

Marc Bell

The Blaze and the Blizzard

THE BLAZE

It was the beginning of the 60's and it was a cold winter. I was living in Cambridge, Massachusetts on River Street along with my mother, two brothers and two sisters.

It was a cold November night, at that time kerosene was the source of heat. The furnace or stove was in the front room. It was brown and box shaped and the stove pipe went into the front room wall. The stove was three feet high.

It was very cold that night, and my room, which I shared with my brothers, was freezing. My mother was asleep on the front room chair. I went to the front room and turned the stove up to get more heat, then went back to bed. As I fell back to sleep, I heard a loud yell, "Wake up! Wake up! We have to get out!"

As I opened my eyes, the room was full of smoke, billowing above the floor. I rolled out of bed and the smoke began closing in on the small space left, where there was air. As I crawled, I didn't know where everybody was. All I heard was my mother calling, "Come on!" As I went through the back door, the clean cold snow awaited, a relief from the smoke filled interior that was behind me.

My mother was counting heads, me, my youngest brother, and my two sisters were there, but the brother under me was missing.

My mother cried out, "Oh No! He's still in there!"

Just then, the fire engine pulled up and my mother began to go back into the house for my brother. The fire man grabbed her and asked where he was. Then the stove exploded and the fire started consuming the front room.

Two fire men went into the house and we waited for what seemed like a long time. The two fire men came out with my brother who was still asleep. The fire man began to shake him, and he woke up.

We got into the ambulance; everybody was safe and alive, then I realized that I had started the fire. The guilt began to seep in like water in the basement. And I lived with that guilt until I was thirty nine years old when I finally told my mother.

THE BLIZZARD

After the fire, we moved to Howard Avenue in Roxbury. The house set on the corner of Quincy Street and the school was directly across from us. I used to sit in the window and watch the cars and people go by, hoping to see some action.

When it got closer to Christmas and it was getting very cold, I watched the trees become bare and the ice forming around the street and icicles start to become a dominant fixture.

Then the snow began to come slowly and cover up the land. When I woke up the next morning the snow was consuming everything. There was nobody walking and hardly a car or truck. The window looked like the inside of a snowflake and you could only see through the middle. As the day wore on the snow was relentless, and it looked mad, with its constant pounding and winds yelling.

By evening, our furnace bellowed its last protection of warmth and refused to work. As the landlord and his handy man tried feverishly to revive our salvation of warmth, we all huddled around an electric hot plate, wrapped in a dark, gray army blanket from welfare, trying to stay warm.

And then the pipes with the nectar of life froze and the icicles that were once outside, now took up residence with us. Its long cold touch reached from the spigot to the drain and all the sinks in the house were the same.

We stayed that night and all of us were wondering what morning would bring. When I woke up I could no longer look out the window, the ice engulfed the view. My mother told us to get dressed. We had to leave the house. The pipes had burst and the electricity went out and even the hot plate was useless.

As we opened the door, the snow was about to invite itself in, because we had five steps and three were covered up in snow. We started the long procession, from the snow to wherever my mother was taking us. We finally reached her friend's house.

It was like paradise. There were lights and heat and food. That night we slept comfortably until my brother woke up from a nightmare screaming that Frankenstein was on the door knob.

Marc Bell



Marc Bell has been a recovering addict for ten years. He is the father of girls, sixteen and five years old. He has lived in Boston since 1959. He likes politics and current events and helping people.

Herman Barringer

Our Future

Things we do and say, make a difference in somebody's life if not our own. We have to be careful of what we do and say. We have forgotten the Golden Rule, which is basically, treat people as you want to be treated. I think it is easier to walk around with a smile on your face instead of a frown. If everyone could say one kind word to someone, it would be a better place and world. This society now has put the mighty dollar in front of moral values. This is being played out in our kids now. They don't know if they are coming or going, so we can't blame them all for what they do. They only play out what they see. Babies are not born in the world with hatred and prejudice; that is something they are taught, so we have to be very careful to what we say and do in front of them, because — they are our future.

*Herman Barringer works in
Environmental Services at
Boston Medical Center.*

Studying

My name is Daurin Arias and I am going to talk a little about my classes. I have been in this country for six years. Studying had never mattered to me until someone from my union approached me, offering me classes for free. This was somewhat difficult for me because I work from 4:00 in the afternoon until 6:00 in the morning. But I decided to take two days of class a week. I feel happy because after two weeks of studying I've achieved what in six years I couldn't achieve. I can read a little and I try to write too. Friend, I advise you that work isn't everything in life. We should take time to study and be someone more important in life. I already feel like another person and I am sure that when I finish my classes, I will be prepared to make my dreams reality.

Things That Can Happen To You

This is a second story from my life. In this country, because I couldn't speak English, as I told you before, the following thing happened to me: My wife was pregnant and, in her ninth month, she had problems giving birth. I didn't know what was happening and I couldn't do anything because I didn't speak English. My wife couldn't see the baby, and she and the baby were on the verge of dying.

Before she was born, my daughter had a heart attack. She also defecated and it all went into her lungs. After that, another problem was that she was born with the umbilical cord in a knot and wrapped around her neck. And worst of all, she had problems with her blood sugar level. A baby is supposed to have a blood sugar level above forty-five and hers was between twenty and twenty-three. This was a very difficult experience for me because I didn't know what was happening to my wife and daughter until two days later, when my wife was able to explain everything that had happened. And all this because I didn't know English.

Daurin Arias



Daurin Arias is twenty-seven years old and he has two daughters. He works for Jewish Memorial Hospital and is a member of SEIU Local 285. He is from the Dominican Republic and has been in this country for six years.

Risto Apostoli



History of Risto Apostoli

I am Risto Apostoli. I am from Albania. I came here in America April 12, 1996. May 6, I started work in hospital Framingham in housekeeping. I live in Natick. Right now I support my family because my wife has part-time job, twenty hours.

*Risto works in the Housekeeping
Department at Columbia
Metrowest Medical Center in
Framingham. "I like my job. I
like to study. I have one child.
He likes to play sports."*

Edgar Alvarez

The Most Important Day of My Life

The date most important was born my daughter. My daughter, she was born November 11, 1990. Her name is Sarah Camila.

Edgar Alvarez worked at Columbia Metrowest Medical Center in Framingham, and participated in the WEP classes for one cycle. He returned to Colombia in July to be with his family.

*Camilo Alvarez,
Marta Espinal,
Ana Valencia,
Marcio da Silva,
Marvin Craig,
and Isabel Rosario*



Camilo Alvarez (Artist)

Camilo is from Colombia. He has worked at Columbia Metrowest Medical Center in Framingham for 4½ years in the Housekeeping Department.

"I like this country for the different seasons. I like to drive to work and see the big sun — red, yellow, orange . . . beautiful!"

Different Recipes for Yucca

We all eat yucca in our countries, but we call it different names and cook it differently.

In Jamaica we call yucca "casava" and we make a dish called "Bommy." It is the same as "Casave de Yuca" in Puerto Rico. To make it we first grate the yucca. Then we take a piece of cloth, roll the grated yucca inside, and wring it so the starch comes out. In Jamaica and Puerto Rico we use the starch for ironing clothes, to make them have good seams, and to make the cuffs and collars of shirts stiff.

Next, you put a pot on the stove. When the pot is hot you put the yucca inside and press down hard to make like a beautiful plate. Put a little salt on it. After it cooks a little, turn it to the other side. You can eat it with coffee or beans.

In Brazil we call yucca "mandioca" and we cook it in a different way. First cut the yucca into pieces then cook it in water until it is soft and a fork can go in. Then drain the water and mash the yucca like potatoes with your hands or with a machine. Then make the yucca into balls and make a small hole to put beef, salt fish, or chicken inside. Pinch the hole closed and fry them in oil. We call this "bolo de mandioca." You can also just fry pieces of yucca in oil. This is called "mandioca frita."

In Colombia the word "yuca" is the same as in English. We put yuca in soup or in a dish called "Sancocho." Sancocho is a stew with chicken, beef or pork rib mixed with yuca, potatoes, green plantains, carrots, and some green vegetables. We eat Sancocho for special meals, like Sundays, or when we invite friends for dinner.

Mmmmm, que rico! . . . Bon appetit!! . . . Buen provecho!!! . . . Enjoy your dinner!



CAMILLO ALVAREZ

*Staff
of the
Worker
Education
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*Left to right:
Jenny Utech, Sharon Carey,
Amy Battisti, Harneen
Chernow, Gretchen Lane,
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